



# THE TELECOMMUNICATORS ARE OUT THERE

Recruiting them to your ECC depends on knowing where to look.

By Dana Armstrong and Cynthia Fell

**I**n this challenging hiring environment, managers have become focused on how to fine-tune their recruitment process to attract the highest caliber employee. A well-thought-out recruitment plan can make the difference between adequate staffing and overworked employees who are making up for a staffing deficit.

Emergency communications centers (ECCs) across the United States are clamoring for good people who will commit to their agency, fit with their culture, and have the professionalism and skills necessary to do the job. As those of us in the trenches of this industry know, that seems like an impossible task.

But it is not. In fact, recruitment can occur anywhere. It can happen with the barista that makes your morning coffee or the neighbor that lives down the street. Where do we find these talented, professional people whose values and morals align with our organizational culture? Aside from casual moments of recruiting, employers can

look for qualified candidates among these venues and demographic groups.

- 1. High schools and colleges:** Educational institutions are well versed at assisting their students in planning for the future. Career planning is often a focus of a high school or college counselor. The 9-1-1 field is a section of the first-responder family that may be forgotten when looking toward a student's future. ECC administration should make connections at schools to ensure current job openings are well known. This may also pave the way for 9-1-1 professionals to visit classrooms to teach students about their job

and what the 9-1-1 career offers. If high schools or colleges have a career night a member of the ECC staff should attend. Many agencies focus on getting into high schools, but 2- and 4-year colleges can be a wealth of potential candidates. Students in criminal justice programs already want to be in the field, and while many of them are focused on police roles, others are still searching for the “right” career. Most criminal justice programs are thrilled to have speakers discuss their agencies and every semester is a pipeline of potential new employees. Law Enforcement Recruitment Strategist Matt Cobb of Topeka, Kansas, advises going beyond criminal justice. Consider other programs with low placement rates and starting wages, including business, psychology, sociology, government and political science, communications, and public relations.<sup>1</sup>

**2. Social media:** The number of social media platforms available for community outreach are multiplying. It is the employer’s job to connect with the audiences that use these platforms. The types of users vary between X (formerly

Twitter), Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn and YouTube. There are values to each platform. Videos are typical methods of communication on these platforms and an ECC can quickly compile a short recruiting video to publish on social media. Niche online groups are a great way to recruit potential talent. For example, there are countless Facebook groups dedicated to public safety and public safety telecommunicators. You may even find some locally. People who join these groups are either already working in the industry or they might want to be. Be sure to check with the admins of the groups you choose to join as not all of them welcome salesy recruitment. According to Global Media Insight, YouTube is globally expected to reach a whopping 2.85 billion users in 2025.<sup>2</sup> It is the second most-used social media network in the world after Facebook. Statistics show that YouTube is the No. 1 video-sharing website in the world with 95% of the internet using it.<sup>3</sup> If your agency hasn’t already, perhaps it’s time to consider getting a piece of that pie.

**3. Influencer marketing:** Forbes Coaches Council member and human resources consultant Michael Timmes states millennials will be approximately 75% of the workforce by 2025, and Gen Zers are not far behind.<sup>4</sup> This vast pool of potential talent is often highly influenced by, well, influencers. Companies are beginning to turn to influencers who have the attention of large audiences to attract potential talent. The key is to use the right influencers in your niche<sup>5</sup> and guess what? Public safety does have influencers. Chances are, you may follow some of them on social media. Influencers typically have their own way of marketing content. Agencies can reach out to their influencer of choice to see how best to work together.<sup>5</sup>

**4. Homeowners associations and community events:** Attend a homeowners association meeting or community event. There is true value in hiring someone who lives in the jurisdiction you serve. Employee will want to do a good job and strive to provide excellent service to their neighbors.

**5. Military and veterans community:** If you live near a military base, you may

## Found, But Do They Fit?

The art of determining what kind of recruit matches your ECC.

By Cynthia Fell

Once the recruiter determines where to recruit, they must determine what characteristics to look for in a future public safety telecommunicator. Do you value multitasking most, or is comfort with technology key in your emergency communications center (ECC)? Is organization of top importance to your 9-1-1 team, or do you focus more on compassion with the community and callers? The recruiter should brainstorm these characteristics and order them from most to least important. This will help to quickly evaluate candidates who have applied or expressed interest at a community event. These characteristics can also lead you to determine additional locations to recruit candidates.

Once you determine your ideal characteristics, you can determine what jobs outside of 9-1-1 match these characteristics. What other job requires communication, multitasking, organization and teamwork? What jobs require compassion, emotional control or decision-making skills? Historically, such skills are required in retail employees, the food service industry and health care. Those are charged with recruiting can often find great candidates in these fields. It is crucial for a recruiter to be ready to market open 9-1-1 positions to workers that demonstrate key job qualities.

Another crucial step in recruiting is to determine how you test or otherwise screen candidates. Any portion of the hiring process can unintentionally screen out qualified candidates, such as through prohibitions on beards, tattoos or requirements for formal education. If you choose to test, the ECC should investigate all options and determine what test is best for their center. There are several vendor-crafted tests on the market that are vetted and currently used in the industry. If this is cost-prohibitive, an agency-crafted test can be given to get a baseline skill level. Other free screening options can include a skills test (typing and/or 10-key) and a dispatch sit along. These tests or screening tools can be used for the employer to screen out candidates that don’t fit with the organization or for candidates to remove themselves from the application process if they choose.

A thoughtful recruitment strategy combines finding recruits with assessing them. It can serve to attract and hire qualified and talented individuals who contribute to the department’s future.



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have a unique market of people looking for work. Military spouses are some of the most resilient, hard-working people. The downside depends on the length of their spouse's orders, but many of them are actively seeking work and may be able to commit to a few years of service, especially those whose spouses are in the National Guard or Reserves.

Another segment of the military family is retired or separated veterans. Many veterans who exit the military struggle with returning to civilian life and translating military duties to civilian jobs. They may be looking for a second career or want to continue in public service. Those who are separating from service must go through a program called Transition Assistance Program (TAP). Cobb recommends developing relationships with TAP personnel to begin recruiting on military bases.<sup>6</sup> If you don't have a military base nearby, reach out to those in neighboring states. When separating, many veterans look in other states for employment.

**6. Your own employees:** Perhaps we saved the best for last. No one knows your agency better than your own employees,

and they should be on the recruiting team. If you have great employees, they may have great friends interested in the industry. Pragna Solutions, a Redmond, Washington-based recruitment and technology consultant, suggests using your employees' testimonials and stories.<sup>7</sup> Encourage them to be part of your social media platforms, to share at college recruitment fairs and to use their own creativity to bring ideas to the table. Start your recruitment drive on home turf with your own employees.

This list may give you some ideas to think outside the box for recruiting great candidates, but it is far from all-inclusive. There are many creative recruitment ideas out there. And there are countless potential public safety telecommunicators out there. You just need to find them. ●

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